



Excerpt from

Deadly Sacrifice

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My impression of Venue Park, Stoke Newington is a sprawling place of tall trees, bushes and grass that attracts a lot of families during the summer. In the winter it is dead except for people walking their dogs and brave teenagers trying to make out in the icy weather. Today it was alive with police and flashing lights. We approached a tall, hefty uniformed officer standing by the gate that barred the park. DS Philip showed his badge and the constable nodded.

'It's right in the middle, sir. Follow that path,' he pointed.

We pushed forward with our heads bent against the night drizzle that fell like mist from the moonless sky. As we continued raindrops from the leaves trailed wet marks on our cheeks and then we heard the voices in the distance. I only raised my head when it got louder. We arrived at a clearing surrounded by bright floodlights that cast huge shadows on the police officers standing by a small cordoned off area. My eyes were drawn to the shrub in the middle of the clearing. A uniformed female officer joined us and I recognised Mary Clark from my old unit.

'Mary hi! What've got here,' I asked.

I remembered Mary as a big Irish brunette who liked to be in the thick of action. She tried to smile at me and failed. I noted the shock that shot out of her eyes and the paleness of her face.

'I should have known you would be in the heart of this African *juju* thing, Toks.' She directed her gaze at the shrub. Her jocular tone sounded false. 'You must take a look for yourself. Here. You need these.'

She passed both of us some protective clothing.

Philip said nothing but his eyes, like mine, were glued to the shrub. He turned to Mary. 'Has the pathologist been yet?'

'No. We're waiting for her.'

Philip joined officers and began talking to them.

I lingered by Mary. 'Is it very bad?'

She nodded as her eyes filled with tears. I went to join Philip. He pulled up the tape and we both went under. My heart beat so loudly that all other sounds became muffled. I was right to feel as I did. We were now standing by the patch. It had close-clustered leaves with thin, scraggly branches. The earth around it was dark and wet and just by one of the low branches sat a black clay pot. I bent down beside Philip and it took a while for my brain to register what it was seeing and then I found myself choking back bile. I could make out some reddish--yellow liquid, floating pieces of food and at its' centre nestled what looked liked a child's shrivelled feet. I counted ten toes and as I peered closer, recognised some cowrie shells as well. I turned to Philip knowing my face could not hide my terror.

'Is this her?' I asked.

'It has to be. No hope now.' he said and shook his head. 'We never really finished that torso in the Thames business and now we have this.'

'I can't understand it.' My voice was shaky.

He looked at me intently.

'Do you recognise anything that will help us.' His voice became urgent. 'I've seen a lot of...so-called satanic cults, witch's covens.....but, what is this? Is it African?'

Toks, please think!'